

German Studies Department: Summary of departmental goals and outcomes

Revised 2014

Students majoring in German should attain strong proficiency in the German language, the kind of intercultural competence that presupposes linguistic immersion, a sophisticated understanding of German-speaking cultures, their history and literatures, expertise in the skills of writing and cultural analysis, and a grounding in critical theory and the diverse analytical approaches it affords. These goals are inextricably connected with one another, and all are ongoing processes, so inevitably there will be overlap in “outcomes” and assessment tools.

A) GOAL: Language Proficiency. Linguistic proficiency is by no means the goal *per se*, but the basis for a major in German at Macalester. Students majoring in German are expected to achieve at least advanced-level language proficiency according to the guidelines prescribed by ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) and by CEFR (the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) relating to all four linguistic modalities: reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

OUTCOME: Advanced German Proficiency at Minimum. Students will use all four modalities of the language flexibly and effectively for social, professional, and academic purposes. They will understand a wide range of authentic narrative and descriptive texts, recognizing implicit meaning, and will be aware of aesthetic properties of language and linguistic styles. They will understand extended speech, including idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. They will have sufficient control of structures and vocabulary to express themselves without much searching for expressions in social, academic, and professional situations. They will be able to produce clear, well-structured, detailed texts on complex subjects, showing controlled use of frequently used structures, vocabulary, connectors, and cohesive devices.

ASSESSMENT:

--Successful completion of at least two advanced seminars on the Macalester campus taught entirely in German (all of which require students to have completed the Macalester language sequence through German 308/309 or the equivalent). Students read literary or theoretical texts in German dating from the 18th-21st centuries, write reading logs, exams, and argumentative essays in German, and conduct discussions and presentations in German.

--Successful participation in a German study abroad program conducted in the German language, usually the six-month Macalester German Study Abroad Program in Berlin and Vienna. Here they complete two additional Macalester courses in German and two at the University of Vienna.

--Goethe Institute study and Certificate Qualification. The students who participate in the Macalester German Study Abroad Program complete two months of intensive language study at the Berlin Goethe Institute. Moreover, they test for official Goethe Institute certificates, qualifying them for employment in German or for advanced studies at German universities. The level of certificate the students achieve depends on the level of courses taken at the GI and on which exam the student completes (usually ranging from B2 to C1).

--Successful completion of the senior seminar in German, which continues the rigorous exercise in the academic use of the German language and culminates in a capstone project and presentation of the project at our Senior Capstone Presentations.

--Post-graduation employment of German skills. Many of our majors pursue study or employment which allows them to use and enhance their German skills. Our 2012 alumni survey bears this out.

OUTCOME: Intercultural Competence. We subsume intercultural competence under language proficiency because we believe the latter to be a precondition for the former. In learning the language, students learn the culture, becoming aware of the relationship between the language and its context, whether contemporary or historical, professional or informal. They will understand that perception, thinking, feeling and acting are culture-specific; they will adapt their language use to a variety of social situations; they will produce a variety of types of texts, such as letters of varying degrees of formality. Crucial, if less measurable, components of this competence include the distance they will gain from their perspectives of their own (usually US American) culture, and the ability to respond appropriately to cultural situations.

ASSESSMENT: Though we consider this cultural knowledge essential to our students' experience, it is more difficult to assess by formal means. We observe it, however, in students' ability to adapt to teaching and administrative methods at the Goethe Institute, the Austro-American Institute in Vienna, and the University in Vienna on our own study abroad program (for example, to understand a university system that differs vastly from a liberal arts college). We also observe it in students' interactions with their residential hosts in Berlin and Vienna. Concrete indicators include the student evaluations the International Center solicits each year from our study abroad program, exit interviews we have been administering bi-annually to graduating seniors, who often talk about learning German and living abroad as "life-changing," and the 2012 alumni survey that preceded our last departmental review.

B) GOAL: Knowledge of German Culture, History, and Thought. While we do not require our students to study a specific canon of authors or historical periods, we expect them to develop both breadth and depth in their knowledge of literature, film, art, music, or philosophy of the German-speaking countries and to develop a general knowledge of modern German—and to a lesser extent Austrian—history (18th century to the present).

OUTCOME: Students will be able to discuss the significance of several specific works and/or cultural artifacts from a variety of historical epochs. The significant aspects students will be able to describe may include salient features of aesthetic form or style, relation to social, cultural, or historical context, or implications for critical theory.

ASSESSMENT: Assessment of this knowledge is of course cumulative. The senior capstone project is the most concrete culmination of a student's achievement of this objective, but all of their coursework and their study-abroad experience contribute to this objective. Specific examples of assessment include:

--In-class performance, including discussion, and successful completion of upper-division

courses taught in German, including those at the University of Vienna (or another German/Austrian university).

--Term papers, capstone projects and presentations;

--Attendance and participation in undergraduate student conferences both at Macalester and other institutions;

--Fellowship awards like the Fulbright Teaching or Research Award, the U.S. English Language Teaching Assistantship Program in Austria, the German Study Fellowship (the German equivalent of a research Fulbright),

--Successful pursuit of Internships such as the Center for German and European Studies (University of Minnesota)'s "Berlin Goes to Germany," or WorkArt program.

--In many cases, acceptance to graduate school in German, Comparative Literature, or a related field.

--Exit interviews and our 2012 alumni survey testify to students' perceptions of having gained a high level of critical literacy in our program.

OUTCOME: Students will demonstrate concrete knowledge of major historical events, ideologies, conflicts, and personalities associated with modern German & Austrian history. They will also understand and be able to critically assess primary and secondary sources; cultural expression in historical context historiography; the role of such constructions as race, ethnicity, gender and class in German experience.

ASSESSMENT: Same as the above. In particular our "bridge" courses, German 308 and 309, place a focus on social history.

C) GOAL: Text Analytical skills. Concomitant with their growth in understanding the German language and culture, our students develop the core skills that a liberal education with an emphasis in the humanities is designed to cultivate. Although they are interrelated, we prefer to distinguish goal "B," Knowledge of German Culture," from the more broadly-applicable skill set we describe in this section.

OUTCOME: Students will demonstrate a critical literacy that will manifest itself largely on two levels:

Reception: They will be able to read critically. By "read" we mean not only the literal reading of a written text in German or English, but also "reading" a visual, audio-visual, or musical text (identifying structures, motifs, tropes, or genres);

Production: They will be able to speak about cultural texts in a formal or informal (e.g. a class, seminar, or conference discussion), as well as develop and defend a thesis in an argumentative essay that is lucid, articulate, and well structured, that distinguishes analysis from opinion and, when appropriate, effectively incorporates secondary sources. Their writing will display awareness of terminology appropriate to their topic, and to orienting their writing to an appropriate audience. All of the above apply to both our German- and English-taught courses.

ASSESSMENT: Same as in goal B.

D) GOAL: Theoretical Perspectives. A unique component of our program is our focus on making students aware of the presuppositions underlying all of the above. We require that they reflect on how cultural taxonomies, hierarchies, and (linguistic, national, historical) discourses affect our understanding of culture by gaining familiarity with critical theory and its approaches.

OUTCOME: Students will have at least a basic familiarity with theoretical paradigms central to the humanities today (e.g., psychoanalysis, discourse analysis, deconstruction) and major theoretical thinkers (e.g., Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Lacan, Foucault) and how they approach cultural questions. Students will be able to challenge or affirm the explicit or implicit positions of texts (including “texts” produced by the media or even in real life) on the basis of these texts’ stated and unstated assumptions and/or the perspectives they adopt or omit. In some cases students may make contributions to the theoretical field in the form of novel theoretical models, concepts, and methods, as well as original analyses and revisions of extant theoretical work.

ASSESSMENT: Majors must successfully complete at least one course introducing them to critical theory. In addition to courses with this explicit focus, all literature, film, and culture courses include theoretical readings and cultivate students’ theoretical awareness and expertise. Beyond successful completion of coursework and capstones, specific indicators of theoretical expertise include:

--in-class performance, capstones in German and/or the critical theory concentration

--presentations in undergraduate conferences and/or publications;

--successful applications for post-graduation fellowships (e.g., DAAD, Fulbright Research Grant) and for graduate academic programs in theoretical fields;

--internships or (especially after graduation) consultant work for companies that require skills in social, visual, and cultural analysis;

--post-graduation presentations or publications in professional conferences, mass media (e.g., literary columns, op ed’s, film reviews for newspapers and magazines), academic journals, and books.

DEPARTMENTAL ASSESSMENT TIMELINE:

Note: Since we are a small department and we all teach at all levels (with the exception of theory, but even here we all incorporate theoretical readings and perspectives), we intend to collaborate on assessment each year.

2014:

Outcomes to be assessed: Language Proficiency and Intercultural Competence.

We have some experience assessing the proficiency of students completing the language

requirement; we will turn our focus to our majors. We will track the level at which our students are placed by the Goethe Institut (where the evaluations break down specific components of language performance) and the results of official GI certificate testing. We need to explore ways of intercultural competence more concretely; one idea we've had is to design a post-study-abroad survey geared specifically to cultural awareness.

2015:

Outcomes to be assessed: Ability to discuss in speech and writing German-speaking works and cultural texts from several historical periods; Ability to discuss in speech and writing German/European history. We will assess student capstone as well as papers from upper-level courses with a specific eye toward these two outcomes. We have already developed a detailed rubric for assessing these skills. Since University of Vienna courses aimed at native Austrians presume a broad preparation in these areas, we will track student completion and performance in these courses (or equivalent courses, should student attend other programs). We will also compile information on receipt of scholarships or internships that testify to the students' qualifications in the eyes of external agencies. And we will orient our own feedback tools (exit interviews, for example) toward these outcomes.

2016:

Outcomes to be assessed: Text-analytical skills. We will examine many of the same factors with a specific focus on broad skills. These include:

1. Reading and artistic comprehension, i.e., the "receptive" or hermeneutic skills of understanding.
 - a) Students will be able to understand, interpret and/or summarize passages taken from a variety of text types, such as **visual arts**, literary works, cultural **products and** theory, historical sources, **and** philosophy.
2. Writing
 - a) Students will be able to develop and defend a thesis in an argumentative essay (in German or English).
 - b) Students will be able to write a paper that is well-structured on all levels (sentence, paragraph, overall disposition).
 - c) Students will be able to accurately and critically incorporate secondary sources into a research paper.
3. Oral communication.
 - a) Students will be able to make an oral presentation such that the audience can follow and understand the material and retain salient points.
 - b) Students will be able to engage in seminar or conference-style discussion, including the ability to respond to or ask questions after an oral presentation.

2017:

Outcomes to be assessed: Theoretical Skills. We will collect sample papers from each student from the course that s/he takes as the “critical theory for the major” course. We will track student success in conferences, fellowships, and admission to graduate schools.